



HIH Birddogging 101:

The art and science of extracting answers from policymakers

We almost never speak directly to **people with the power to give us what we want**, and they almost never hear from us. Public meetings like summits, town halls, and election season are invaluable opportunities to make unfiltered requests directly! **TARGETS:** (a) An policymaker with a name and the ability to enact, block, or enforce *a law*, (b) and/or spend US\$100 million or more. (c) **TARGETS are people, not faceless institutions. NGOs and UN officials are not targets; they do not have the power.**

GOALS OF BIRDDOGGING:

1. Get answers on the record by asking the right questions, in-public, in-person, and on camera. *See below on impactful questions.*
2. Create movement for more funds for rainforest community solutions by getting the attention of policymakers and pressuring them directly, without intermediaries—while letting the media know.

CORE MISSION+MESSAGING—keep it simple, look to the future! Avoid technical, jargon-filled partisan laundry lists, or asking why a policymaker did something bad *in the past*. Use future-tense “*will you...*” closed-ended Y/N questions about our core demands: Governments+multilaterals must fund *rainforest community-designed-and-operated* solutions from rainforest communities. **Core messages:**

1. We want governments and multilateral donors to *annually increase* percentages of funding for climate change directed to rainforest communities to implement their own, locally designed solutions.
2. IPLCAD protected land and IPLCAD interventions = greater impact for less money less than anything else.
3. We want annual increases for forests and climate too—but *our unique ask* is **locally-designed solutions**.

BIRDDOGGING BASICS

We aim to **win the room**, with a *deeply felt, widely understood* question that your target can neither avoid, nor answer with a “no”, without exposing themselves as unqualified. *They should look good for saying yes, and look bad for saying no.*

1. **Find an event:** Summit/campaign/town hall events are often publicized. Also: maybe you know your target is on the board of XYZ Club, and the Club is having a donor dinner - show up! Advo team can help.
2. **Get a crew:** 2-7 people are all you need to successfully direct the conversation at a town hall!
3. **Make a specific plan:** Agree on a goal, put together 2-3 questions (each more or less the same topic), or, if no Q&A, come up with a chant, tuck paper signs into your clothes. Don’t ask questions about more than one or two topics—every question is like a pebble on a scale, and each is more powerful than the previous. Don’t scatter your pebbles—tip a scale! *Make sure that **everyone understands everyone’s questions**, so you can back each other up. *i.e.* “I was going to ask you about XYZ, but you didn’t answer that other person’s question over there. Will you commit to annual increases in funding for indigenous solutions?” This helps assure that the event is dominated by your concerns. **The HIH Advocacy Team will, on request, help you develop an event-specific, target-specific plan.**

*Everyone WRITE DOWN ON PAPER your question/s to take to the event. *PRACTICE & role play. Time yourself reading the question. **A good Q is about 30 seconds, and absolutely no more than 60 seconds.**

4. **Show up early to get GOOD SEATS (& check EXITS!):** Wear generic clothes, avoid activist t-shirts and buttons. Spread out: different parts of the room get called on—but aim for very close to front and center. **Make eye contact with the target. Cheer wildly** so the official identifies you as supporter—not *protester*.
5. **Raise your hands FIRST, FAST, & HIGH** - you want your questions to be first and frequent. **Do this for every question**, and your team will get all the questions. Remain standing after your question.

6. Execute your plan! Your team can **hit with follow-up questions** if the MOC avoids or only partially answers the first time. You can also politely interrupt them if you notice they are changing the subject.

7. **Other teammates record** the verbatim response: on paper & also video. But YOU focus on holding them on topic. Don't hold up a camera. (If solo, record from front pockets.) DON'T sit down, DON'T give up a mic.

8. **Get a handshake:** Often there is a handshake line at the end. EVERYONE rush and get in line together. Take turns asking a 3-4 second question. Try to keep shaking their hand. Get selfies and ask them to autograph something(s). This slows down the line and gives each member of your team more time to put pressure on your target. BONUS ROUND: follow them out when they leave to continue the conversation.

9. AFTER target leaves: Find **journalists to repeat your message**. Answer the question the reporter *should* have asked, rather than the off-topic question the reporter may likely ask. Stay on message! (i.e. "The real story here today is [your issue]..."). **Plan a soundbite**. It's easier to be concise when you're prepared.

10. **Report back to your group, and to HHH Advocacy Team.** This will be turned into leverage later. If we know exactly what the target said in one town hall, we can follow up at the next (i.e. "Minister, at COP 30, you promised you'd support an increased percentage of GEF funds directed to Indigenous People's climate solutions. What will you do to ensure the GEF Board votes on this?" **IF you're at an event where you can only submit written Qs:** consider making your questions vague, but ask your *real* question at the mic. PRO TIP SECRET: It's surprisingly effective to *walk up and ask the moderator for advice* about your question: Once they've 'helped' you, they are almost certain to call on you. **If no chance to speak**, raise your hands anyway—it works! Fold signs in clothes. Have a chant. Stake out and approach targets entering and exiting!

INGREDIENTS OF AN IMPACTFUL QUESTION (60 seconds or less)

Good questions start with a mini-story that is personal and emotional about you or people you care for ("I lost my beloved aunt to an invader illegally ranching..."), generalizes your concern to give a sense of the scope ("Thousands of other rainforest communities have been hurt as well"). Include ONE fact, not a list: ("Science has repeatedly proven that Indigenous People's climate solutions are *much* more effective than external initiatives"). Then ask a "Will you promise to..." question that **requests a specific action in the future**. ("Will you fight for \$5 billion annually for for Indigenous Communities save the rainforests Earth needs to survive?") Don't ask "What will you do about X?"—instead ask closed-ended, yes or no questions. In most cases, don't ask "Why did you do that bad thing?"—it's too late to do anything, and this backward-looking question will prompt a thousand-word response leading to *applause for the bad action*. 😞

REALLY IMPORTANT: your question *contains the answer*. Ask them if they will do a *specific thing*. We have a simple, specific agenda, and do not want to be distracted by the slippery nonsense that targets can raise to obscure that some of their plans do little or leave rainforest communities much worse off. Focus on requests from the core messages above. Advocacy Team can help!

Bad: "What will you do about the destruction of rainforests and their communities?" **Impactful:** "Rainforest communities have proven climate solutions that accomplish *more* results for *less* money. Will you lead or co-sponsor an initiative to annually increase the percentage of climate and forest funding that goes directly to rainforest communities to implement Indigenous climate interventions? (Instead of costly pass-through agencies and big NGOs.)" **Or:** "Too many corporations still profit from deforestation in climate-critical rainforests. Will you lead or co-sponsor an initiative to stop big businesses with deforestation in their supply chains from selling products into wealthy nation markets, and instead support Indigenous Peoples to protect the rainforests we all need to survive?"

Need help finding an event, drafting a question, or putting together a plan? We're here to help!

belai@healthinharmony.org • pd@healthinharmony.org